

Yet you need not experience a lifetime of counseling. Complete healing will come through your faith in Jesus Christ and His power and capacity, through His Atonement, to heal the scars of that which is unjust and undeserved. You may find that hard to believe with your current feelings. I have witnessed how the Savior has healed aggravated cases of abuse in that way. Ponder the power of the Atonement.¹² Pray to understand how it can heal you.¹³ Seek the aid of your bishop so that the Lord can free you of a burden you did not originate.

In closing, if you have felt impressions to be free of burdens caused by yourself or others, those promptings are an invitation from the Redeemer. Act upon them now. He loves you. He gave His life that you may be free of needless burdens. He will help you do it. I know that He has the power to heal you. Begin now. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Mosiah 24:14.
2. Alma 41:10.
3. See Doctrine and Covenants 82:10.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 19:4, 15–24.
5. See Harold B. Lee, *Stand Ye in Holy Places* (1974), 220–21; see also Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (1969), 177–90, 201–12, 339–60.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 1:31–32; italics added.
7. Alma 38:8–9.
8. See Alma 39–42.
9. 2 Nephi 2:7; see also Psalm 34:18.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 64:9–10; see also Mark 11:25–26; Luke 6:37; Mosiah 26:29–32; 3 Nephi 13:14–15.
11. See Matthew 11:28–30.
12. See John Taylor, *The Mediation and Atonement* (1882).
13. See Richard G. Scott, in Conference Report, Apr. 1992, 43–46; or *Ensign*, May 1992, 31–33.

Elder Kenneth Johnson

Lessons from a childhood experience

I was raised by caring parents in a home where the values taught and practiced prepared the way for my introduction to the Church and an acceptance of gospel principles. I was baptized in the month of August 1959, shortly after my 19th birthday. As I ponder the events that preceded my conversion, my thoughts go back to a childhood experience.

The home of Mr. and Mrs. Lyons

Close to the home where I lived as a child was a large house. It was located on beautiful grounds, enclosed by what was to me a towering fence made of wood paneling, probably six feet in height. I recall peeping through holes in the panels where knots of wood had dropped out. It was like looking through a telescope into a different world. The beautifully manicured

lawns, the well-kept flower gardens, and a small orchard provided an idyllic setting for the distinctive dwelling. Unfortunately the opportunity to enjoy the view was always brief due to the vigilant British bulldog that patrolled the gardens and was immediately attracted to anyone standing close to the exterior of the fencing. Even though the fierce dog was confined in the garden, the sound of his sniffing as he approached the fence caused me to retreat in fear as my vivid imagination conjured up a variety of possibilities.

Mr. and Mrs. Lyons, who lived in the home, were schoolteachers. They had a dignified demeanor and seemed to enjoy the privacy that the house setting afforded them. To add to the intrigue, Mr. Lyons had no right hand, using instead a steel hook that protruded below the cuff of his jacket. In my boyish mind, I could imagine Mr. Lyons pursuing me, catching me by

the collar with the hook, and taking me captive.

Access to the apple trees

I recall an August morning when I was 10 or 11 years old, following a night of unusually strong winds, being greeted by friends as I left my home. They were obviously excited by something and inquired, "Did you hear the wind last night?"

When I said that I had, they proceeded to tell me what they had discovered—that the wind had blown down sections of the fencing surrounding the Lyonses' home. I could not understand why this would cause so much excitement and asked them to explain the significance.

They responded with even greater enthusiasm: "We have access to the apple trees!"

I was still very cautious and asked, "But what about Mr. Lyons?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Lyons are not at home; they are away visiting relatives."

"Where is the dog?" I probed.

"The family has placed him in boarding kennels," came the reply.

My friends had certainly carried out detailed research. So, reassured by their words, we headed for our target with all haste. Entering the grounds, we climbed trees and hurriedly plucked fruit, filling our pockets and also the space between our shirts and our bodies. My heart was pounding and my pulse racing, since I feared that any moment the dog or Mr. Lyons, or both, would appear in the garden and apprehend us. We ran from the scene of our trespass to a secluded place in a nearby wooded area and, after regaining our composure, began to consume the apples.

Discomfort of eating bitter spoils

It was August, and the apples were not yet ripe enough to eat. In fact, they had a very bitter taste, but the tartness of these green apples did not deter us as we enthu-

siastically consumed our spoils, acting out of a compulsion I cannot now explain. After devouring a significant number, I contented myself with taking a bite out of each remaining apple and throwing the remnants of the fruit into the nearby bushes. The frivolity diminished as our bodies began to gradually react to the invasion they had experienced. The chemical reaction between my gastric juices and the unripe apples caused me to experience stomach cramps and to feel nauseated.

Filled with remorse

As I sat regretting what I had done, I realized that a feeling within me was producing even more discomfort than the unripe apples. The greater discomfort resulted from the realization that what I had done was wrong.

When my friends had proposed that we invade the garden, I had felt uncomfortable but lacked the courage to say no and so suppressed my feelings. Now, after the deed had been accomplished, I was filled with remorse. To my regret, I had ignored the promptings warning me of the error of my actions.

Still, small voice warns us against evil

Physical barriers and external forces may prevent us from pursuing deviant paths, but there is also a feeling within each of us, sometimes described as a still, small voice,¹ that when recognized and responded to will keep us from succumbing to temptation.

Years later the words of President Boyd K. Packer touched a tender chord within me when he taught, "We cannot set off on a wrong course without first overruling a warning." I thought of that moment and others like it—the impressions and insights that come as we contemplate the consequences of our actions.

The prophet Mormon expands our view of the source of those impressions in these words: "The Spirit of Christ is given

to every man, that he may know good from evil."²

The proposition that we all have this gift of guidance is supported in the Gospel according to St. John, wherein it is written concerning the Savior that He was "the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."³

These stirrings within us originate from a divine source and, when followed, will help to keep us on course, thus protecting us from harmful influences and dangerous detours.

A prompting to resist temptation to smoke

Several weeks after the experience with the apples, I set out to join my friends in the wooded area close to home, anticipating that we would devise some activity or game to play. As I approached them, they were huddled together. I saw smoke rising in the air above them and recognized the aroma of burning tobacco. One of them had obtained a packet of cigarettes, and they were smoking. They invited me to join them, but I declined. They persisted, suggesting that my reluctance to participate was a sign of weakness. Their taunts turned to ridicule, combined with condescending remarks. But nothing they could say or do could persuade me to change my mind. I had not been raised with a knowledge of the restored gospel and knew nothing of the Word of Wisdom, but I was restrained by a feeling within that I should not participate with them.

As I walked home reflecting on the decision I had made, I felt good inside. Although my expectations for the day had not materialized and I would have to find a way to occupy my time without my friends, I had discovered something about myself—about the source of real happiness and the invigoration that results from making the right decision, whatever the circumstances or outcome may be.

Hearken to the Spirit

Revelation received by Joseph Smith the Prophet describes the benefits associated with adhering to this inherent compass in this passage of scripture:

"And the Spirit giveth light to every man that cometh into the world; and the Spirit enlighteneth every man through the world, that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit."⁴

Not only does this verse provide a further witness that we all have access to this source of divine direction, it also emphasizes the need for us to hearken, or listen and respond, to the promptings we receive. The promise that follows is of great significance to me:

"And every one that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Father."⁵

These intimations, sometimes referred to as conscience but more accurately defined as the Light of Christ, not only help us in deciding what is right and what is wrong, but they will, if followed, lead us to the source of that light which emanates from the presence of the Father and the Son.⁶

The Savior promised His disciples: "If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth."⁷ He further describes this gift as "the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost."⁸ One may experience manifestations of the Holy Ghost, but the gift is conferred and can be received only by the laying on of hands following baptism.⁹

I have come to more fully appreciate why it is written of His disciples on the Western Hemisphere, "They did pray for that which they most desired; and they desired that the Holy Ghost should be given unto them."¹⁰

He is the consummate courier of truth.

Holy Ghost guides us, reveals God's ways

As I have looked back over my life, it is clear to me that many decisions—some seemingly small at the time and others with which I have wrestled, recognizing their import—have caused me to climb to higher planes than I would have reached if I had not yielded to the enticings of the Holy Spirit.¹¹

Without this glorious gift, we cannot comprehend the purpose of life or the great plan of the Eternal Father.¹² For “it is impossible that man should find out all his ways. And no man knoweth of his ways save it be revealed unto him.”¹³

Relying on logic and exercising intellect will not suffice: “Neither is man capable to make them known, for they are only to be seen and understood by the power of the Holy Spirit, which God bestows on those who love him, and purify themselves before him.”¹⁴

Gratitude for the gift of the Holy Ghost

I cannot find words to adequately express my feelings concerning the Light of Christ and the gift of the Holy Ghost. They are as “a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”¹⁵

Consider the petition of the Savior to the Father concerning the twelve disciples in the land of Bountiful, expressed in these words:

“Father, I thank thee that thou hast given the Holy Ghost unto these whom I have chosen; and it is because of their belief in me that I have chosen them out of the world.

“Father, I pray thee that thou wilt give the Holy Ghost unto all them that shall believe in their words.”¹⁶

In this turbulent, troubled world, we can find assurance and enjoy peace of conscience by believing the words of the prophets and through the companionship of the

Comforter. Thus we may know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Savior of the world.¹⁷

I declare my witness of these truths in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See George Q. Cannon, *Gospel Truth*, sel. Jerreld L. Newquist (1987), 250.
2. Moroni 7:16.
3. John 1:9.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 84:46.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 84:47.
6. See Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (1939), 60.
7. John 14:15–17.
8. John 14:26.
9. See Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., 5 vols. (1957–66), 2:154; see also Acts 2:38; 8:12–17; 19:1–6.
10. 3 Nephi 19:9.
11. See Mosiah 3:19; Moroni 7:13.
12. See Alma 34:9.
13. Jacob 4:8.
14. Doctrine and Covenants 76:116.
15. Psalm 119:105; see also *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 2:149–51.
16. 3 Nephi 19:20–21.
17. See 1 Corinthians 12:3; Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 243.

President Monson

The choir and congregation will now sing “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet.” At the conclusion of the singing, Elder Claudio R. M. Costa of the Seventy will address us, and he will be followed by Bishop Keith B. McMullin of the Presiding Bishopric. We will then be pleased to hear from Elder F. Melvin Hammond of the Seventy.

The choir and congregation sang “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet.”
